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ABSTRACT

In an effort to foster more positive attitudes toward black people in 5-year-old white children, a career education curriculum was designed to give children positive experiences with black adults. The constructs supporting the curriculum are discussed, and the results of using the curriculum are described. No measurable changes in the children's racial preferences or role perceptions were evident. The implications and limitations of the study are discussed. (Author/SB)

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THE EFFECTS OF A CAREER EDUCATION CURRICULUM ON THE RACIAL ATTITUDES OF KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

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Abstract

In an effort to foster more positive attitudes toward black people in five-year old white children, a career education curriculum was designed to give children positive experiences with black adults. The constructs supporting the curriculum are discussed and the results are described. No measurable changes in the children's racial preferences or role perceptions were evident. The implications of these findings for other work of this kind are discussed.

The Effects of a Career Education Curriculum on the Racial Attitudes of Kindergarten Children

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Georgia F. Peterson

Numerous studies have shown that both white and black children prefer to be white, to play with white children, and associate the color black with negative objects or situations and the color white with positive ones. It has also been well documented that young children recognize skin color differences some time between the ages of two and one-half and five years, with the ages of four and five years being the prime time for recognition. Along with the discrimination between dark and light skin usually goes the awareness that white is more desirable. This information comes from studies done by such psychologists as Clark and Clark (1958), Goodman (1952), Morland (1966), and Williams (1967).

A review of this and other literature, dating from the 1940's through the early 1960's, presents a picture of poor

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self-concept on the part of black children, as well as a kind of "white is might and right" attitude developed by white children. A few more recent investigations (Hraba and Grant, 1970; Ward and Braun, 1972) indicate that the black children they studied had strong, positive feelings about themselves and other black children and adults.

The senior author conducted a study as part of her doctoral dissertation (Kliman, 1974), investigating the racial attitudes and preferences of four and five-year-old black and white children attending integrated day care centers in Wilmington, Delaware. A semi-structured doll play interview was used. As expected, the white subjects preferred white dolls nearly 100% of the time. Black children showed strong preference for black peer dolls, and were equally divided in their choice of black and white adult dolls. This was quite a significant finding for, here again, black children saw themselves and other children like them in a positive way, and did not show a pronounced preference for white adults as had been demonstrated in previous studies.

It appeared that white children were the ones who were exhibiting strongly one-sided racial attitudes and preferences. Although obvious prejudice was not apparent from observing

them in the centers, many of the comments they made during the doll interviews indicated that they did have negative feelings about black people, particularly adults.

We believe that feelings and attitudes have to be dealt with by teachers of young children. They cannot be ignored in hopes that they will go away, nor can teachers pretend that children do not notice who's black and who's white, who wears new clothes and who doesn't, or who has a daddy and who doesn't. Children do notice these characteristics and even if they do not verbalize much about them, they process such information, generalize, and classify it. This is one way in which attitudes, preferences, and, eventually, prejudices are formed.

Research into affective curricula (Durrett, 1970; Singh and Yancey, 1974; Yawkey, 1974) has demonstrated that children's attitudes can be changed by what happens in school. A teacher (or parent) who accepts and respects differences of all kinds, who lets children know that anyone can be or do whatever (s)he wants to, who encourages asking questions, discussing feelings, and solving problems provides a powerful model for children in the area of affect.

With these facts and beliefs in mind, we tried to develop a curriculum designed to foster acceptance of, and respect for,

skin color differences. Most curricula designed to improve racial attitudes has either focused on the color black (Singh and Yancey, 1974) or dealt with feelings and attitudes using puppets, dolls, story books, etc. (Durrett, 1970; Litcher, 1969; Yawkey, 1974). We decided to develop a curriculum for kindergarten children which would use familiar kindergarten materials and techniques, but would give them the concrete experience of interacting with black persons in a positive way. A career education unit seemed well suited to meet these requirements because black adults representing different careers would be introduced to the children as they discussed job opportunities and options as related to their own occupational aspirations. This could easily be done as part of the ongoing kindergarten program, incorporating many of the available classroom materials.

Sydney Marburger, United States Commissioner of Education, is considered the "father" of career education, and it is a concept which has existed - particularly as related to primary and elementary-aged children - for only a few years. Career Education has been defined as

> a comprehensive educational goal designed to provide all youth the opportunity for career awareness and the opportunity to attain skills necessary to achieve economic independence and an appreciation of the dignity of work. (Newark School District, Goals and Recommendations for Implementation of Career Education, 1974, p. IV)

It is divided into three curriculum phases - Awareness (grades K-5); Exploration (6-8); and Exploration and Specialization (9-12).

Briefly, the goals and objectives of the awareness phase of a Career Education unit are: 1) to help children define and clarify roles, starting with the family including self, and moving on to community helpers; 2) to develop responsible attitudes toward work, including the development of positive attitudes about self and others; 3) to realize that all people have dignity and are worthwhile, but also that all people have differing abilities, interests, and values; and 4) to realize that society is dependent upon people working, rewards and satisfactions result when people work, and there are rules for all kinds of work. Since many of these attitudes and occupational aspirations are of little real value without basic skills of communication and computation and the ability to think clearly and solve problems, a Career Education unit at the awareness level knits these components, which have always been basic to early childhood programs, into the learnings relating to work.*

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* More detailed information about a specific Career Education Curriculum may be obtained by writing; Mr. Primo Toccafondi, Project Coordinator, Career Education, Newark School District, Newark, Delaware 19711.

Subjects

The Career Education unit was carried out in a kindergarten in an elementary school in a suburban district in New Castle County, Delaware. The morning class served as the control group and consisted of 27 children - 18 females and 9 males - while the afternoon class was the experimental group and had 23 students - 11 females and 12 males. There were two black children in each class, but their test scores were omitted from the data analysis. The children had all reached their fifth birthday by November 30. The education of the subjects' parents ranged from completion of high school to several who had attained a Master's degree. The study was conducted during the last week of January and the first two weeks of February, 1975. The regular classroom teacher and the investigator were white.

Method

A doll interview, administered by an undergraduate Child Development major trained by the investigator, was administered separately to each child before and after the Career Education unit. The interview contained three parts: Skin Color Labeling, Racial Preference, and Role Perception. During the first two parts, the child was shown a black and white child doll of his or her same sex and asked several questions to which

(s)he responded by pointing to or picking up the chosen doll. In the Role Perception portion, the child was shown in pairs, a black and white adult doll, dressed to represent a dancer, doctor, and musician (female), and a dentist, mailman, and policeman (male), and asked to choose the one that was the dancer, dentist, etc. The complete protocol can be found in the Appendix. The six adults were selected because their careers were relevant to the children and were representative of different social classes. We also thought it was important to have equal numbers of males and females. The dentist, dancer, music teacher, and policeman were black; the doctor and mailman were white. The children visited the dentist at his office, while the other adults came to the school.

The investigator assisted the kindergarten teacher with the experimental group for one week before introducing the Career Education curriculum. The format for the unit, which lasted three weeks, was to devote each week to two occupations. The person explained and demonstrated what (s)he did on the job, the skills necessary, and any special tools or uniforms. The following day various activities were available in the classroom such as props for dramatic

play, art, and music activities, books, puzzles, and community helper dolls.*

Results

Both control and experimental group children were nearly 100% correct in the skin color labeling portion of the interview, both pre and post-test. They clearly we able to pick out black and white dolls and match skin colors. These results confirm the evidence that five-year olds can accurately identify skin color differences.

Since the control group received no experimental treatment, no changes were expected in their scores on the Racial Preference or Role Perception portions of the interview. These expectations were confirmed. On both pre and post-test, the control children showed pronounced white preference when asked which doll was nice, pretty, good, etc. and equally pronounced black preference when asked which doll was not nice, not pretty, or not good. They saw white adults as filling all occupations on the Role Perception questions.

The experimental group's Racial Preference scores did not change as a result of the Career Education curriculum.

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* A more complete list of activities, including titles of books and records, can be obtained by writing the senior author: College of Home Economics, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19711.

They, too, chose white dolls as pretty, nice, etc. and black dolls as not pretty, not nice, etc. (See Table I.)

There was no statistically significant change after the experimental treatment in scores on Role Perception. In fact, the girls chose black adults less frequently on the post-test, although the change was not significant. ($p > .05$). (See Table II).

Since these children had interacted with a black dancer, dentist, musician, and policeman, we expected that black dolls would be chosen more often on the post-test for these roles. There were no significant changes in doll choice, however. As with the control children, the experimental youngsters showed strong white preference, negative attitudes toward black dolls, and a clear indication that only white adults were viewed as filling various occupational roles. We must conclude that the Career Education curriculum had no measurable effect on the children's racial preferences and role perceptions.

Discussion

Both investigators continue to believe that young children's attitudes can be influenced by variables in the school setting. Some of the necessary conditions simply were not present in this study.

Three weeks is too short a time in which to accomplish changes of the kind with which we were working, especially since the Career Education unit was a separate part of the kindergarten curriculum, and not integrated into the overall daily program. Although the investigator was with the children for the full kindergarten session every day for the three weeks, the Career Education unit consumed only about an hour each day and was unrelated to the rest of the class activities.

The isolation of the Career Education curriculum was increased by the fact that the classroom contained very few multi-ethnic books, pictures, dolls, or other materials, and there were only two black children in the group. It is possible, therefore, that the classroom visitors served to heighten the children's awareness of skin color differences and the absence of black people in their environment. Their brief experiences with them in the career unit may have made blackness more salient, but emphasized its difference from white. Children often react negatively to stimuli that are unfamiliar or different, which may explain the increase in white choice by some children on the post-test.

It is also quite likely that even if attitude change had occurred as a result of the unit, it might not have been mea-

surable until some time later. Young children often need time to absorb and process new ideas and information. It would have been desirable to have administered the post-test a month or more after the conclusion of the unit.

The impact of the black adults was diluted by presenting four black and two white adult role models. The children saw white models every day in a variety of occupations and did not need additional exposure to them. If the unit had continued for a longer time, it would have been appropriate to use both white and black adults as representative of real life, but the limited time within which we had to work called for only black adults.*

Two additional speculations may be applicable to the subjects of the study and help to explain the absence of more positive racial attitudes after the Career Education unit. Perhaps the children's preferences for white were already so strong that the multi-ethnic materials and visitors were distorted or ignored, or alternatively, the children may have felt overwhelmed and threatened by the "sudden" influx of multi-ethnic materials since their previous exposure to black

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* This was our original intent: however, the principal of the participating school felt that both black and white role models must be presented.

people had been minimal at best. It did not seem that the children were openly prejudiced, nor did they react with fear or dislike to any of the visitors. They did have strong preferences for white, however.

Our study demonstrated that by five years, and probably earlier, children are fully aware of skin color differences. It seems reasonable that any experiences aimed at dealing with attitudes and feelings about skin color differences need to be introduced before stereotypes and preferences have crystallized. This would imply that kindergarten already is too late, and certainly that any experiences planned at this level would have to be very potent and pervasive in order to effect any attitude change. We need to begin talking about feelings with children and exposing them to good models of non-stereotyped behavior which point out the options available to all people, whatever their skin color, sex, or individual skills during infancy and the toddler period.

The above discussion leads to several changes which we would implement in any future work of this kind. A Career Education curriculum should be a year-long theme, beginning with the topic of self awareness. Starting with parents of the children, a wide variety of visitors and trips dealing with careers and spread throughout the year would occur.

The unit would be integrated into various daily activities, rather than being confined to a single pre-designated time each day.

The unit should be taught by the regular classroom teacher who would be able to evaluate children's attitudes, feelings, learnings, and misunderstandings on an ongoing basis. The curriculum could be changed as indicated by children's specific interests and needs. The teacher also would be in a position to help the children become sensitized to the feelings of others through discussion, books, and other experiences. Misunderstandings could be dealt with as they occurred.

Finally, we want to look at what the children learned from the Career Education unit and their consequent introduction to a variety of black (and white) adults. The children thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the unit. Evidence of this came from the children's enthusiastic response, the parents' interest, the principal's comments, and the desire expressed by other teachers that their classes also could have been involved. Learning is always much easier when it is enjoyed by and meaningful to the learners.

There were many instances when it was obvious that with questions, dramatic play, and painting, the children were

working through some of their fears about the people they met and their usual relations to children (dentists, doctors, policemen).

Several children who had never shown any interest or ability in "academic" type skills suddenly became motivated to, e.g., write their names so letters could be mailed, or learn numbers so they could set the timer required in the pretend doctor's office.

The children clearly were stimulated to think about the responsibilities different jobs entail, and the roles people play. For example, they learned that women could be doctors and mothers at the same time.

The children had many positive experiences with black adults. This was a new opportunity for most of them who had had very few, if any, contacts with blacks and definitely not on a nearly one-to-one basis such as the visitors provided. Even if these opportunities had no apparent effect on the children's test scores, we think they will be a positive influence on the children's responses to other blacks they may encounter.

Conclusion

Although the results we had hoped for were not achieved, we learned a great deal about working with young children in

the area of affect-feelings, preferences, and stereotypes. We hope that our experiences will help others dealing in the same areas. We also hope we have pointed out that young children do notice differences between people and do come to school with attitudinal preferences. We cannot ignore these feelings in children, or deny that they exist. One responsibility of all teachers of young children, whatever the ethnic or racial composition of the group, is to provide youngsters with positive and relevant experiences with people who represent diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, careers, skin colors, and life styles.

APPENDIX

I. Skin Color Labeling

The children were shown two child dolls, one black and one white, of their own sex, and asked:

1. Which doll looks like you?
2. Which doll has skin like yours?
3. Which doll has skin like mine? (E's)

Then they were asked:

4. Are you a black or a white child?
5. Am I a black or a white woman?

II. Racial Preference

The children were shown two child dolls, one black and one white, of their own sex, and asked:

1. Which doll is the pretty one?
2. Which doll is the nice one?
3. Which doll is the good one?
4. Which doll is not so pretty?
5. Which doll is not so nice?
6. Which doll is not so good?
7. Which doll would you like to play with?
8. Which doll would you like to invite to your birthday party?

III. Role Perception

The children were shown two adult dolls, one black and one white, dressed to represent the occupation named.

1. Which doll is the dentist?
2. Which doll is the music teacher?
3. Which doll is the mailman?
4. Which doll is the doctor?
5. Which doll is the dancer?
6. Which doll is the policeman?

TABLE I

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP MEAN SCORE

Black Doll Choice
Racial Preference

	5 Positive Questions			3 Negative Questions		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Total Possible Black Choice	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Total Possible Black Choice
Girls(N=11)	2.8	1.2	55	8.6	11.3	33
Boys(N=12)	1.2	1.2	60	11.3	10.3	36

TABLE II

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP MEAN SCORE

Black Doll Choice
Role Perception

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Total Possible Black Choice
Girls(N=11)	3.7	2.7	66
Boys(N=12)	2.2	2.2	72

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